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STATE FOR IO/EDA AND AFR  
INFO USAID FOR DCHA, OFDA GOTTLIEB AND AFR LAVELLE  
USDA FOR FAS HUGHES  
GENEVA FOR NKYLOH/USAID  
BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER  
DAKAR PASS TO BISSAU

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SUBJECT: Exchanging Letters with FAO over Locusts

REF: Rome 3669

1. (SBU) Per reftel, the text of Ambassador Hall's letter to FAO DG Diouf on September 16, 2004 follows:

"I am writing to express the United States' concern over FAO's response to the locust plague in the Sahel. While I know that other donors share aspects of this concern, these views are not shared on their behalf.

As you know, the current desert locust situation continues to deteriorate across the Sahel. Large-scale invasions of locusts have infested an estimated two million hectares in Mauritania, Mali, Senegal and Niger, while swarms have been reported in Burkina Faso, Chad, Gambia and Cape Verde. Though there are no reliable crop assessments to date, OCHA and others predict this locust plague will have greater devastating effects than the last widespread locust plague of 1987-1989. Action is needed now to prevent the situation from worsening.

On Friday, September 10, I chaired a roundtable discussion on the crisis, which was attended by members of FAO and interested parties from the diplomatic community. Experts from the U.S. and FAO briefed the attendees on the current situation, giving a rather gloomy prognosis for the region, and called for additional donor support. I seconded that call.

There was also a good and frank discussion among the participants of what is going wrong in providing assistance to the victims of this infestation. Had our collective response been well organized and targeted from the beginning, it is conceivable that the crisis would not have reached its present magnitude. The donor countries share part of the blame for our slow collective response and contributions to this emergency. For example, we understand that a majority of the funds pledged were only recently made available in August and September. The time between pledges and actual donations is unfortunately too long and requires improvements on our part. Additionally, the affected countries have an essential role to play in responding to the crisis.

However, stronger leadership on the part of FAO is required over the coming months. FAO has a global mandate, nearly fifty years in existence, to provide emergency assistance to countries experiencing agricultural crises such as locust infestations. We hear a chorus of concerns from the field that question whether that commitment is being fully met. In examining some of the critical recommendations made in an after-action review of FAO's role in the last major outbreak of the 1980s, it troubles us that too many of them still hold true. The major critique then was FAO's slow response to the crisis; it remains our worry now.

There are five particular areas of concern that I want to highlight from some of the observations and requests that we have been receiving from our embassies in the Sahel and from the larger donor community.

1) Transparent and timely use of donated funds. In last Friday's roundtable, the Ambassador of one of FAO's major donors articulated what we, too, have been hearing from various reports: FAO is facing a crisis in confidence in response to its handling of the current infestation.

Donors want and need transparency before funding decisions are made, yet I am sorry to repeat that we feel there has been insufficient transparency in FAO's

actions. Donors are now beginning to question whether using a multilateral approach one that is slow in its response is the best and most efficient means to mitigate this crisis. We are still unclear how long the process requires from receipt of funds to arrival of goods and services in the affected countries. [In fact, it took more than six months for FAO to utilize fully a standing emergency grant, during the crucial early stage before the appeal was announced in February.]

2) Delay in establishing a coordinating structure or process. Though it is true funds from donors have come in late, we believe FAO could have done a much better job in organizing itself to confront this crisis. I am glad FAO experts correctly predicted the crisis last October, some eleven months ago. But in anticipation of this crisis, little seems to have been done internally, and it appears that FAO has employed inadequate means and tools to respond to the emergency.

I also question why FAO's ECLC (Emergency Center for Locusts Operations) was reconstituted so late in the crisis, on August 25. This coordinating body would have helped bridge, much earlier on, the internal gaps among technical, operations, and contracting departments. The appointment of one person with overall responsibility for overseeing FAO's response could have highlighted weaknesses within the organization and resolved them earlier on. Even if the declaration of an ECLC were only a formality, an earlier and more timely declaration would have been another way of signaling the urgency of the crisis.

I urge you to give serious consideration to the idea of FAO's setting up a regional operations and coordination center in the Sahel. The center should be established within one of the affected countries and staffed by technical experts and operations personnel. Without well-planned coordination among countries, donors, and organizations, it would be rather difficult to tackle a problem that transcends international boundaries.

3) Inadequate staffing in the field. I understand that until the end of August, FAO had just two experts working in the region to assist host governments. From the beginning, this small presence generated concerns over FAO's commitment and leadership. While more personnel are deploying currently, the cumbersome and time-consuming hiring process has delayed this crucial component in responding to the emergency. Many reports also indicate that the FAO representatives have not responded well to the crisis.

Reports from Mali, Senegal, and Mauritania are that FAO has not taken the lead in organizing the locust campaigns. WFP has had to step into the void in Dakar to perform donor coordination functions. At a recent locust coordination meeting in Burkina Faso, frustrations also surfaced about the role that FAO has played during the locust crisis, both in the country and regionally. Donors noted that FAO had repeatedly said that it had monetary and in-kind contributions, but that it has not so far been able to give a good accounting for the distribution of these contributions. The local FAO representative could not answer questions as she lacked

even basic information about what had been pledged, purchased, and delivered. Donors across the board have been "sorely disappointed" with the performance of FAO's offices in Burkina Faso and Mali. In Mali, FAO recently fielded an excellent logistics officer to work with the government, but he arrived very late and more like him are needed.

4) Lack of quick response mechanisms. When staff from my mission inquired why so few experts had been deployed, they were told that FAO's personnel practices delayed the quick hiring of outside experts. An emergency response unit should have the capability to respond nimbly to crises. In the view of donors and affected countries, FAO lacks sufficient quick-response mechanisms. For example, FAO should have a roster of pre-selected experts whom it can tap the moment a crisis develops. FAO should have "indefinite quantity" contracts for services, supplies, and equipment with a broad range of companies. Terms could be revisited on an annual basis or sooner if needed. This would likely have reduced FAO's delivery time in purchasing pesticides and leasing sprayer aircraft. At the roundtable discussion, an idea of creating a pesticides bank was proposed, something that could have merit. Clearly, innovation is needed.

One consequence of these delays is that donors have had to act independently. In Mali, for example, the U.S. Ambassador directed \$50,000 in disaster relief funds to USAID instead of FAO because FAO had been unable to

provide any effective response to the crisis there. In five-days time, USAID purchased all the equipment and products needed to spray in two of the most severely impacted regions: the Gourma and Timbuktu. When the equipment and products arrived in the Gourma, the whole town celebrated because no spraying was occurring.

5) Lack of a comprehensive information system. Another criticism common among the donors is the lack of shared information. Information on pledges, recipient countries, procurement, etc, was infrequently disseminated. FAO representatives, whether in Rome or in the Sahel, often could not answer basic questions about FAO's response or the regional perspective.

In fact, we received three different figures for overall contributions to FAO as recently as last week. I understood an information system would soon be in place, but to date that does not appear to be the case. FAO should have created such a system back in February when it started making appeals for funds.

In the past, you and I have had frank discussions about the possibility of opening up FAO to an outside evaluation or assessment. This is something I plan to continue to pursue. In addition to that assessment, I would like to propose having an outside assessment of FAO's response to the desert locust crisis, once we have turned the corner. Its purpose is not to point fingers and place blame on individuals or institutions, but to make bold recommendations as to how FAO can respond in a more nimble way to such crises in the future. If there are bureaucratic and regulatory obstacles that limit FAO's ability to respond, then those obstacles should be identified and, to the extent possible, they should be removed. We believe there is much to learn from this emergency operation. It is essential that we learn from this, given the increase in complex humanitarian

emergencies. We also need to look closely at the recommendations on FAO emergency operations from the Independent Evaluation of FAO's Decentralization.

The concerns I have listed above are not contingent on the timing of donor contributions. They are questions of basic management and leadership inadequacies that plague the delivery of assistance at whatever resource levels.

Much is at stake in the Sahel. The potential ramifications of a large-scale locust infestation on the lives and livelihoods in the affected countries are grave. FAO has already warned of severe food insecurity if control operations are not increased to combat the swarms, which are interrupting the current planting season. The combination of loss of employment and food insecurity could lead to rural migration to urban centers. Although the impact of the present locust upsurge on malnutrition levels cannot be determined at present, many children in the region are already suffering from malnutrition, making the potential impact life-threatening. We must work to do better.

I look forward to working with you and your staff to do all we can to alleviate this current crisis and improve all of our responses for the next time a similar emergency occurs. Accept my best wishes and commitment to work together for a world where we accomplish the goal of cutting hunger in half."

12. (SBU) The text of DG Diouf's letter in response to Ambassador Hall's letter to FAO DG Diouf on September 16, 2004 follows:

"I have the honour to refer to your letter of 16 September 2004, in which you raise a number of important issues with regard to FAO's handling of the current Desert Locust invasion in North-West and West Africa.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the keen interest in this matter that your concerns demonstrate, and for your willingness to support FAO's efforts to tackle the crisis and to improve our collective response to an extremely worrying situation for the food security situation of the affected populations. I had the opportunity to address some of the points mentioned in your letter during the donors' meeting which I convened on Friday, 17 September 2004, at FAO's headquarters, but I am pleased to provide you herewith with additional information.

As you rightly point out, action is needed immediately to curb the locust invasion before the winter. In this regard, however, I would to stress once again that FAO did not wait for the situation to deteriorate before acting. The Organization issued alerts to the international community as early as 17 and 20 October

12003. The developments and forecast of the crisis led me to launch an appeal to several donors, on 23 February. The seriousness of the situation was again brought to the attention of the donors in a meeting on 10 March. On 8 April 2004, another donors' meeting was convened at FAO which I personally chaired. I also wrote to the Heads of State and Government of the countries most affected in West Africa (Algeria, Chad, Libya, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, and Tunisia) to stress the need for collective and coordinated action in the fight against the locust plague.

On 7 July 2004, I sent another letter to the Heads of State and Government of donor countries to solicit more funds. At that time, the financial resources required to tackle the Desert Locust invasion were estimated at US\$30 million. Three weeks later, the deterioration of the situation made it necessary to revise this estimate, with funding requirements ranging between US\$58 and US\$83 million, according to the projections of the acreage to be treated. Current estimates amount to US\$100 million if the locust's threat is to be contained before the winter.

As you acknowledge in your letter, despite these repeated appeals, very little funds have been received from donors in FAO's account and a significant time lag has occurred between pledges and actual transfers of funds. As of 14 September 2004, only US\$2 million had been received from donors, including US\$800 000 from the USA. An additional US\$2 million from the USA were received on 15 September and a further US\$ 500 000 on 17 September. On the other hand, signed agreements with donors for which funds have not yet been received represent, at present, some US\$21.7 million. Taking into consideration the urgency of the situation, and despite not being a funding agency, FAO has allocated US\$5 million of its own resources toward the fight against the Desert Locust, in favour of the North-Western Region (Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Gambia, Mali, Mauritania, Morocco, Niger, Senegal, Tunisia) and the Central Region (Eritrea, Sudan and Yemen).

It is the time taken in releasing the donors' funds that has resulted in delays in delivering the inputs to fight the Desert Locust. In this regard, as you point out, FAO must respect the rules and regulations which have been decided and agreed upon by its Governing Bodies, of which donors and affected countries alike are parties. Under these rules, the Organization is not authorized to commit funds to purchase equipment or supplies, or to recruit experts for the operations, if these funds have not been received at its bank account. There may be a need to revisit these rules and regulations in the light of the experience gained from the current emergency locust control operations, but such a review would have to be decided by the Member States of the Organization. In this connection, I welcome your suggestion to conduct in due time an evaluation of the response to the crisis, taking into due consideration the internal and external factors which bear on it. Such an evaluation would certainly shed light on both positive and negative outcomes, constraints, potential for innovative approaches.

Besides the issues of a lack of resources, I also wish to mention that limits imposed by donors for the use of their funds can also create constraints for the implementation of field activities. Earmarking of funds for specific countries, and for the US funding in particular, the prohibition to spend funds on pesticides, make it necessary to secure resources from other sources with no such limitations. In a situation of locusts upsurge as is witnessed at present in West and North-West Africa, the use of pesticides is essential. While funds are also needed to purchase sprayers, vehicles and to pay for flying hours for aerial spraying, the bulk of the funds are to be spent on pesticides, and financial resources must be available for this purpose. To put it roughly, for every US \$1 million provided for spraying equipment and vehicles or for every US\$1 million provided

for flying hours, an estimated US\$3 million are needed to procure the corresponding amount of pesticide to be sprayed.

With regard to your specific mention of the absence of an FAO counterpart in Dakar this summer, I wish to clarify that the FAO Representative had, a long time before, requested to take the annual leave to which he was entitled. In accordance with the normal procedures of the United Nations, I myself designated the representative of another UN institution (WPP) to ensure the interim arrangements. He did not on his own "step into the void in Dakar". I brought back the FAO Representative for the Ministerial Meeting of CLCPRO members on 31 August 2004 in Dakar and when the evolution of the situation

warranted it, I immediately called him back from his leave, which he had not even completed.

As to procurement, the issue has not been one of advance planning as FAO did conduct advance tenders and market research. The issue was confirmation of the timely availability of resources as pointed out in your letter.

While I recognize the usefulness of the information that your Country Representatives can provide you, I wish to point out that I have received a somewhat different feedback during the visits that I undertook myself, on several occasions, to the countries affected by the locust invasion, including, in mid-August, Senegal and Mauritania jointly with the President of the African Union, H.E. Alpha Oumar Konare, and Burkina Faso early September. I also had the opportunity to discuss personally with several Heads of State and Government of the region and have regular phone contacts with the Ministers of Agriculture. These field visits and discussions provided me with first-hand knowledge of both the damage caused by the locusts' plague and the perception, by the countries concerned, of the actions taken by FAD and the responsiveness of the FAD Representatives.

This being said, I acknowledge the need to improve the flow of information between Headquarters and the field, and I can assure you that steps have been taken over the past weeks to establish a consistent and regular exchange of information regarding the planning and conduct of the locust fight operations on the ground, and to be shared with representatives of donors and the government in the country. This is being done through various means of communication, including daily phone calls, emails and the use of interactive monitoring and implementation systems through the Internet.

With respect to staffing, it is demand driven and is adapted to the volume of operations. That is why FAO is taking further action to strengthen its field staff and, more specifically, the Secretariat of the Commission for the Control of Desert Locust in the Western Region to support further emergency operations.

Once again, I am grateful for your genuine wish to improve the response to the Desert Locust crisis so that it can be tackled as quickly and as efficiently as possible, with the view to protecting food security. I am most willing to consider and further discuss with you any suggestions that you may have to strengthen the capacity of the Organization to tackle the present and other similar emergency operations, and that could be brought

to the attention of the Governing Bodies concerned, should the need arise.

Accept, Excellency, the assurance of my highest consideration."

13. (U) MINIMIZE CONSIDERED.  
Cleverley

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